

Final Report
TOWN MEETING STUDY COMMITTEE
October 1997



Point of Order Mr. Moderator!

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The Charge

The Town Meeting Study Committee was established by the 1996 Annual Town Meeting "to study procedures and practices associated with Town Meeting, and submit recommendations for improvements therein to the next annual Town Meeting, said study to include but not be limited to the efficiency and size of Town Meeting and its function and accountability as a legislative body." The committee was constituted by the Moderator in June and began meeting in early July, 1996.

The Premises, Principles and Process

In the spring of 1996, Amherst voters strongly endorsed the Town Meeting form of government. Accordingly the Committee directed its efforts towards strengthening and improving Town Meeting. Recognizing both the historical populist traditions from which our representative Town Meeting evolved and the legislative acts which determine its form, the Committee focused on making Town Meeting in its present form more efficient and encouraging greater participation.

The Committee acknowledges as virtues the principles of efficiency, accountability, and equal representation of all Amherst's citizens. At the same time the Committee recognizes that each of these has a cost. Efficiency must be balanced against the freedom to debate issues fully. Accountability must be balanced against the danger of overly politicizing Town Meeting.

In the course of its deliberations, the Committee drew upon the experience, thoughts, and judgment of many people. The Committee heard from the Moderator, the Town Manager, the Finance Director, the Chair of the Select Board, and the editor of the Amherst Bulletin and consulted informally with the Chair of the School Committee and Town Counsel. In addition, the Committee did the following:

1. Held an open meeting at the Jones Library on September 12, 1996, and received written comments from those who could not attend.
2. Circulated a memorandum to Town Meeting members in October, 1996, inviting comments and suggestions.
3. Studied election and attendance information for the years 1991 to 1996.
4. Sent a questionnaire in November, 1996, to all individuals who were elected to Town Meeting in 1994 but are no longer members.
5. Sent a questionnaire to all elected members of Town Meeting in January, 1997.
6. Published a preliminary report in April, 1997.
7. Published a final report in October, 1997.
8. Submitted recommendations to Town Meeting for appropriate action.

The Town Meeting Study Committee wrestled with the very important issues of whether the body truly represents the population of Amherst and whether anything can be done to attract more people to run for Town Meeting.

Diversity

The Committee reviewed the occupations of members and found that 27% work in education at some level, 20% can be classified as professionals, 18% are retired, 7% are self-employed in some capacity, 7% are homemakers, and 4% are in business. A student study of Town Meeting conducted last May elicited 161 responses. That report presented some interesting demographic data.

	Town Meeting	Amherst
Average Age	54	20's
Number over 60	34%	6.7%
Live in a single family home	80%	41%
Education beyond B.A. degree	70%	n.a.
Annual income over \$50,000	60%	26%

Moreover, the students found that the racial mix in Town Meeting is similar to that of the Town.

We can only speculate as to why the demographics of Town Meeting are so different from the population at large. Suggestions include:

- News about local government is provided by the Amherst Bulletin which is delivered to households upon request.
- Many inhabitants of Amherst are transient and have no long-term stake in the Town.
- For families with small children the need for childcare makes it difficult to participate.
- Older people have more time to participate in Town Meeting.

While we could not come up with any recommendations to address these issues, we did not find anything intrinsically exclusionary in the nature of Town Meeting.

Participation

We addressed the worrisome trend of declining numbers of people willing to run for Town Meeting. The first step was to look at some of the reasons why people might not choose to run.

- Many people are just too busy.
- Some people feel that Town Meeting does not represent their views and choose not to participate.
- Others feel that their time is better spent on other activities.

- Newcomers to Amherst are not used to participatory democracy.
- Election deadlines are not well publicized.
- Town Meeting has become too time consuming.

Our recommendation for simplifying the nomination process is one step towards encouraging more people to run.

The Committee discussed other ways of encouraging more participation in Town Meeting. The January survey of Town Meeting members provided a number of useful suggestions. First and foremost is the need for more publicity about Town Meeting. Coverage of local government by the Amherst Bulletin and radio stations has been cut severely in recent years. In spite of the efforts of Amherst Community Television, the number of people who follow Town Meeting is not very large. If we want more coverage of Town Meeting, the printing of election deadlines, and a thorough airing of important local issues, residents of Amherst will have to pick up the pen, the typewriter, or the word processor and write about Amherst. The Select Board, the Town Manager, and various committees need to provide press releases about their work. Op Ed pieces are effective but seldom objective. Articles that highlight individual Town Meeting members might be a way to emphasize the role of Town Meeting members in the local government process. Other suggestions for improving participation include:

- Encouraging the School Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Select Board to hold meetings in different parts of Town, thereby bringing government to the people.
- Community recognition for those who serve as Town Meeting members.
- A direct mailing to voters that describes the importance of Town Meeting and provides information on how to run.

Ultimately we concluded that the nature of volunteer participation is such that only a fraction of the population at any one time is willing and able to do it. The fact that more than 540 people served as Town Meeting members between 1990 and 1996 shows that participatory democracy is not dead.

* * *

The issues of diversity and participation in Town Meeting are difficult ones. There are no obvious solutions. However, the Committee believes that if Town Meeting conducts its business in an efficient and responsible fashion and if enough information reaches the general public, more people will choose to participate in Town Government.

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Are we talking about the
amendment to the substitute motion
on the divided article?

Recommendations:

The Election Process

A. The Committee recommends that the number of regularly elected Town Meeting members be maintained at the present number of 240. *Recommended by a vote of 6 to 1.*

1. Arguments in favor

- A large body of silent but attentive members prevents Town Meeting from taking precipitous actions.
- A larger Town Meeting is more inclusive. With more people elected, there are more people involved in Town affairs.
- A larger Town Meeting provides more opportunity for minority representatives to be elected. It is easier to achieve a diversity that more truly reflects the population in Amherst.
- Reducing the number of members would not expedite the business of Town Meeting. The most vocal and visible members would continue to be elected.
- Less than 1/3 of the members of Town Meeting ever speak on an issue.
- Reducing the size of Town Meeting would make it more political. Serious campaigns would be required to be elected. It would be harder for persons without a public persona to be elected.
- A smaller Town Meeting would enhance the power of the ex-officio members.

2. Arguments against:

- In most precincts there are not enough candidates available to fill all the seats. Fewer seats would go vacant or be filled by write-in candidates with a handful of votes.
- With more contests for election the body would more truly reflect the viewpoints of townspeople.
- Town Meeting members would be more dedicated. Attendance would improve. Boards will be able to assume that the homework has been done.
- It would be easier for residents to know who represents their precinct.
- With fewer Town Meeting members the technical difficulties in recording votes and increasing the visibility of members would be reduced.
- In a large meeting it is hard for the Moderator to get a sense of the meeting and direct the deliberations towards a conclusion.
- Reducing the number of Town Meeting members would ease the logistics of mailing out information and checking in. Debates will be shorter because the members would be better informed.
- The very nature of a smaller meeting would encourage people to talk less.
- Reducing the number of members would elevate the prestige associated with being elected.

B. The Committee recommends that candidates for Town Meeting be listed on the ballot simply by filling out a form at the Town Clerk's office. The requirement for ten signatures on a petition is abolished. *Unanimous.*

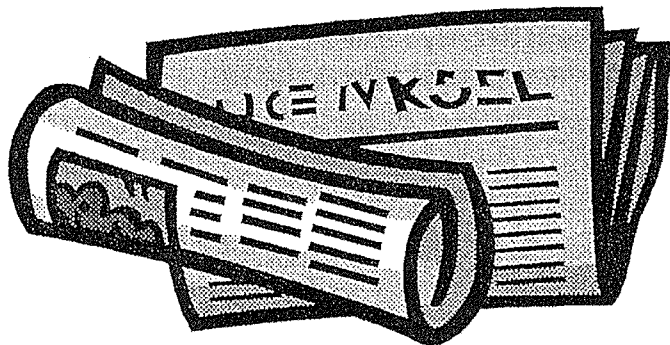
1. Arguments in favor:

- Since it is possible to be elected to Town Meeting with one vote, the number of names needed for nomination should be consistent.
- The change would make it easier to become a candidate and possibly broaden participation in Town Meeting.
- The study of Town Meeting elections and attendance showed that people elected with fewer than ten votes usually become active Town Meeting members.

2. Arguments against:

- Too many candidates might appear on the ballot.
- Circulating a nomination petition forces a candidate to interact with precinct residents and demonstrates a level of commitment to Town Meeting.
- If it is too easy to be elected, the status of Town Meeting members is downgraded.

C. The Committee recommends that the Moderator write a letter to those Town Meeting members who are absent from 80% or more of the sessions of the Annual Town Meeting or all of the Fall Town Meeting. The letter will include a reminder of the obligations of being a Town Meeting member and an invitation to resign if the obligations cannot be met. *Unanimous.* Members are absent for a variety of reasons. Attendance records show that some attend only one or two sessions after being elected. Not only do they deprive their precinct of proper representation but they also make it more difficult to obtain a quorum.



Extra! Extra! The Town Meeting Study
Committee issues its final report!

D. The Committee recommends that the Town Clerk routinely notify members in a precinct when a vacancy occurs that cannot be filled by an election before the Fall Town Meeting or a special Town Meeting. In addition, the Town Clerk shall initiate the process for filling the vacancy. *Unanimous.* Currently the Town Clerk is the first to be aware of a vacancy but is not obligated to notify precinct members. The result is that the vacancies remain unfilled unless someone is sufficiently alert to call for a precinct caucus.

E. The Committee recommends that the following procedure for filling a vacancy in Town Meeting be added to by-laws.

In the event of any vacancy in the full number of elected town meeting members from any precinct, the Town Clerk shall, not less than six weeks prior to the special (fall) town meeting, notify the remaining elected members of the precinct and the newspapers of said vacancy. Following said notification, candidates shall have two weeks to file nomination papers at the Town Clerk's office to fill the vacancy. The Town Clerk shall then certify the qualified candidates, mailing to the remaining Town Meeting members in the precinct a copy of that certification together with a ballot identifying the qualified candidates and the number of vacancies to be filled. The remaining Town meeting members in the precinct shall, on or before 5:00 P.M. of the fourteenth (14th) day following said mailing, cause their ballots to be delivered to the Town Clerk in a sealed envelope. On the first business day following said fourteenth (14th) day the Town Clerk shall open the envelopes at a public meeting. If the number of certified candidates exceeds the number of vacancies the Town Clerk shall certify the election of those with the largest number of votes, a tie for the last seat to be determined by lot. If the number of qualified and certified candidates shall be equal to or smaller than the number of vacancies the Town Clerk shall certify the election of all those receiving a minimum of one (1) vote.

Unanimous. The current procedure is needlessly cumbersome. It is often very difficult to convene a caucus that has a quorum. Under the proposed procedure it will be easier to fill the vacancy until the next election.

Preparation for Town Meeting

- A. **The Committee recommends that the school and municipal budgets be organized and formatted the same way.** *Unanimous.* There is a consensus that the format of the municipal budget invites scrutiny, while that of the school budget discourages it. There are no longer any technical reasons why this change cannot be made. This recommendation has been forwarded to the Finance Committee.
- B. **The Committee recommends that the background material on zoning articles include the old laws or regulations as well as the proposed changes.** *Unanimous.* All too often just the changes are described, and Town Meeting members have no idea of the context of the proposed action. Frequently this information is requested during the debate.
- C. **The Committee recommends that the Select Board provide written commentary on warrant articles.** *Unanimous.* The comments provided by the Finance Committee are very useful in providing a framework for debate on articles. The Select Board approaches the issues from a different perspective. Written commentary provided in advance would complement the information from the Finance Committee.
- D. **The Committee recommends that when there is dissent within or between boards on an article, the written background material delineate the minority positions.** *Unanimous.* Time will be saved if both the majority and minority positions are presented in writing before the session at which the article is addressed. Town Meeting members will be alerted to issues that are potentially controversial.
- E. **The Committee recommends that all town committees and the public be routinely notified as the deadline for the submission of warrant articles approaches.** *Unanimous.* Committees and citizen groups often work on warrant articles that they wish to present to Town Meeting. With timely notification they could submit the articles early enough to receive adequate review.
- F. **The Committee recommends that a warrant preview session be instituted.** *Unanimous.* A warrant preview would better prepare Town Meeting members. However, to be effective it must be limited to issues that are likely to provoke debate. Moreover, there must be an opportunity to ask questions of town officials.

- G. The Committee recommends that an effort be made to provide newly elected Town Meeting members with information about the procedures, protocols, and customs of Town Meeting. *Unanimous*. Everything possible should be done to help new members become active participants in Town Meeting. Suggested methods for accomplishing this goal include a booklet of useful information and a video that could be borrowed from the Town libraries.
- H. The Committee recommends that the Moderator compile a list of capital items needed for the auditorium to properly accommodate Town Meeting. The list will be given to the Joint Capital Planning Committee and to Town Meeting for their consideration. *Unanimous*. Other recommendations in this report call for capital items like microphones and mixers. Presently there is no program for acquiring equipment for Town Meeting.
- I. The Committee recommends that the tables with handouts be limited to items relevant to articles before Town Meeting. Each document shall be signed, dated and labeled with the article number. New and old items are on separate tables. All other material shall be placed on a table outside of the meeting room. *Unanimous*. The issue is orderly availability of related documents. Town Meeting members need easy access to materials relevant to articles and do not want them mixed in with other materials, such as background studies, reports from previous Town Meetings, individual and group position papers, etc. These extra written materials should be placed on a table outside the hall. All materials (inside and outside the hall) must be signed or clearly marked as to their origin. New materials should be clearly marked and kept separate so a Town Meeting member can update his or her portfolio without confusion.
- J. The Committee recommends that selected town officials be present at the time Town Meeting is supposed to begin so that they can respond to questions from Town Meeting members and other citizens of Amherst until a quorum is present. *Unanimous*. The issue is salvaging dead time between the official starting time and the arrival of a quorum by allowing people to ask questions of elected officials, the Town Manager, or department heads on a variety of topics. Town Meeting would turn to the warrant as soon as a quorum is attained.
- K. The Committee recommends that a cadre of volunteers who are not Town Meeting members handle the sign-in process. *Unanimous*. Currently one or more Town Meeting members assume this task, but it detracts from their duties as a member.

Conduct of Town Meeting

- A. **The Committee recommends that whenever an article or motion is available in written form and on the screen, it not be read unless there is legal necessity.** *Unanimous.* Dispensing with the reading will speed up the pace of Town Meeting.
- B. **The Committee recommends that if the Moderator considers a question to be relevant to the debate, every effort be made to secure an answer.** *Unanimous.* Past practice has led the Moderator to announce that while a Town Meeting member can ask a question, there is no requirement that it be answered. If an answer cannot be provided immediately, an effort should be made to provide a response at a subsequent session.
- C. **The Committee recommends that the Moderator appoint a parliamentarian who may only be appealed to by the moderator and at his or her sole discretion.** *Unanimous.* The Moderator has a number of tasks to handle during the course of Town Meeting. Occasional doubts over procedure could be more quickly resolved if the Moderator could call on a parliamentarian.
- D. **The Committee recommends that time limits on speakers be rigorously enforced.** *Unanimous.* Rather than automatically asking for additional time, the Moderator should ask a speaker to yield the floor to others. The individual may ask to be recognized again later in the debate. The limit would still be no more than two speeches by one person on the same article. One result will be that speakers will prepare their speeches more carefully. The survey of Town Meeting members showed overwhelming support for this action.
- E. **The Committee recommends that presentations of articles by town boards be limited to information. The presenter shall not use the opportunity for the expression of his or her personal opinion.** *Unanimous.* In the interest of fairness, board members should not use their office to advocate a personal position on controversial issues.
- F. **The Committee recommends that Town Meeting members disclose points of personal interest when they rise to speak on an issue.** *Unanimous.* Meeting members can better evaluate a speaker's remarks if they know about perceived conflicts of interest. Such an acknowledgment will enhance the credibility of the remarks.

- G. The Committee recommends that, except for initial presentations, board members seated at the front of the hall use the microphones on the tables to comment on articles. *Unanimous.*** The issue is efficient and effective use of time. Over the course of a Town Meeting minutes can be saved if the Select Board and other boards up front speak from their seats. Lines of visibility are good and Town Meeting members can see them while they address the meeting.
- H. The Committee recommends that municipal officials be seated in the front row when articles concerning their departments are under discussion. *Unanimous.*** This change would save time.
- I. The Committee recommends that microphones be set up in the aisles so that there will not be a delay as speakers come to the front of the room. *Unanimous.*** The microphones would be located approximately half way down each of the two aisles. Persons wishing to speak would come to the microphones if they wish to be recognized by the Moderator.
- J. The Committee recommends that after three consecutive statements on one side of an article, the Moderator call for a speaker on the other side. If none is forthcoming, the meeting proceeds to a vote. *Unanimous.*** There is no reason to prolong debate when there is a consensus on an issue. There have been occasions when Town Meeting discussed a question at length only to discover that almost everyone was in agreement. This step will save time without sacrificing fairness.
- K. The Committee recommends that after the initial presentation of an article, which shall be no more than five minutes without leave of the meeting, speakers be limited to three minutes during the ensuing debate. In addition, the audible warning signal shall be eliminated. *Unanimous.*** Rarely do speakers need more than three minutes to get their point across. When they use more time, it usually means they are wandering from the point of the discussion. The warning signal causes many speakers to panic and think they have already used up their time. A clock that is visible to speakers would be more useful.

L. The Committee recommends that the motion to limit debate is not debatable and requires a two-thirds majority. The provisions of the motion are:

- Each subsequent speaker is limited to two minutes without extension.
- The total number of speakers on each side of the issue is limited to three.
- The Moderator attempts to alternate comments for and against.

Unanimous. The motion to limit debate complements the present motion to end debate. It would allow the debate to proceed for a brief period before Town Meeting comes to a vote. Even if a motion is doomed to defeat, the alternation of speakers would allow a position to be fully described for the record.

M. The Committee recommends that whenever Town Meeting holds a standing vote, the position of each member be recorded, provided that the time required is no longer than needed to conduct a standing vote. **THE OFFICIAL VOTE WILL BE THE COUNTED STANDING VOTE.** *Recommended by a vote of 5 yes and 2 no.*

Discussion: The vote of each member will be collected during the standing vote but not recorded until after the conclusion of Town Meeting. The results will be part of the public record. The current tally vote procedure is left intact. With a tally vote, the individual ballots are counted during the session and provide the official vote.

Arguments in favor:

- Town Meeting members should be held accountable for the votes they cast. Residents of Amherst currently have no way to judge whether a Town Meeting member represents the viewpoints of constituents.
- Recorded votes would indicate which members actually participate in the deliberations.

Arguments against:

- Vote counting tends to inordinately "politicize" an issue which can compromise a Town Meeting member's freedom to vote his or her own personal better judgment.
- Precinct accountability is not served. Generally speaking precinct residents vote for a person willing to serve and whose judgment they respect. On the whole it is special interest groups that are interested in voting records, not the electorate.
- Since any member of Town Meeting can call for a standing vote of Town Meeting, the recorded vote provision may be subject to abuse.
- Recorded votes could delay the progress of Town Meeting.

Suggested procedure for conducting a counted vote

- *Appoint a second set of tellers to collect cards.*
- *During the yes vote the cards would be placed in a properly labeled envelope.*
- *During the no vote the procedure would be repeated.*
- *The cards would be counted and the names recorded after the end of Town Meeting.*

It is entirely possible that the recorded vote might differ from the standing vote. The difference is not likely to be significant. Since the standing vote is official, action on an article would not be jeopardized. There is no obvious incentive to cheat.

- N. The Committee recommends that no article be started after 10:00 PM without a positive vote of Town Meeting. Unanimous.** The issue is one of discipline around adjournment time and the fatigue level of members.

Not Recommended

- O. The Committee recommends that except for the Moderator, ex-officio members of Town Meeting not vote. The Moderator votes only in the case of a tie. The president of the Jones Library Board of Trustees is added to the list of ex-officio members. Rejected by a vote of 3 yes, 4 no.**

Arguments in favor:

- Separation of Powers – members of the School Committee and the Select Board act as executives.
- Members of these boards along with the chair of the Finance Committee, the Town Manager, the Town Clerk, and local legislators are elected or appointed for reasons other than to vote on Town Meeting articles.
- The sight of members of boards voting on articles exerts undue influence on other members of Town Meeting.
- Their listing as voting members increases the number needed for a quorum.
- Not all officials elected town wide are ex-officio members.
- Some ex-officio members are present only during the discussion of issues immediately relevant to their missions.
- It is possible to be an ex-officio member without the right to vote.
- If members of the school board, a single-issue group, are ex-officio members, then the president of the Jones Library board of trustees should also be a member.

Arguments against:

- The present procedure causes no problems.
- Separation of powers is not the model under which Town Meeting was created.
- Under current laws, ex-officio members are not allowed to run for Town Meeting. If they cannot vote as ex-officio members, they would be unjustly deprived of rights enjoyed by all other citizens of Amherst.
- When people are elected to town-wide offices, it is understood that being active in Town Meeting is part of their duties.
- Most ex-officio members are very knowledgeable about the issues associated with Town Meeting articles.



Appendix A

Election and Attendance Information

The following information was obtained from records at the Town Clerk's Office. The original intent was to look for correlations between attendance and the effort to get elected. During the debate on the Charter there was a suggestion that the threshold for election should be raised to at least the number of signatures needed to be nominated for Town Meeting. The unstated assumption is that someone elected with fewer votes is not a full participant in Town Meeting.

In looking at the assembled information, the reader should remember that precinct lines were redrawn in 1994. All 24 seats in each precinct were up for election. For the purpose of this study the year runs from one annual town election to the next. All special Town Meetings were included.

General Information

Number of people who served in Town Meeting between 1990 and 1996:

546

Number of people who have been Town Meeting Members for seven consecutive years: 72

Number of new Town Meeting members by year

Year	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Number	54	48	41	102	37	42

Total Number of sessions by year

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Number	16	16	12	14	12	9	9

Election Results

Number of people elected with fewer than ten votes.

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Number	8	5	9	11	4	11	7

Number of elected Town Meeting members from Precinct 4*

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Number	24	24	21	25	16	21	20

*This is the only precinct which has regularly not filled all its seats.

Attendance Results

Number of people who attended less than 1/3 of the sessions in a given year.

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996*
Number	35	24	37	37	6	21	37

*Spring Town Meeting only

The majority (67%) of no-shows was individuals who dropped out of Town Meeting as soon as their term was finished. Only 17% of the no-shows (19 individuals out of the total of 546) remain members while attending less than 1/3 of the sessions year after year.

Number of people who attended less than 1/3 of the sessions and were elected with fewer than ten votes.

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996*
Number	2	3	10	9	0	3	9

*Spring Town Meeting only

A total of 58 different individuals were elected with fewer than ten votes out of the total of 546 people who served in Town Meeting during the time period studied. The average attendance rate of those 58 was 55% compared with the 71% average for all Town Meeting members.

Number of people who attended more than 80% of the sessions in a given year.

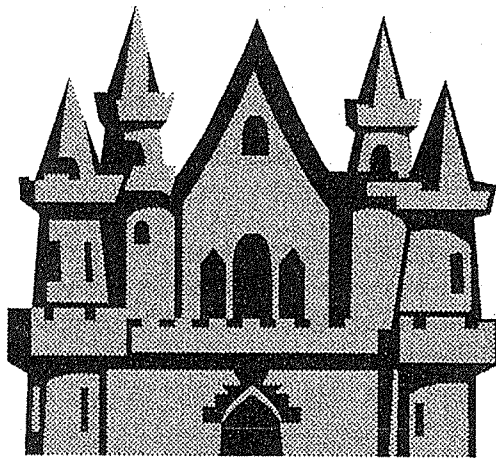
Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996*
Number	114	137	124	121	142	120	132

*Spring Town Meeting only

Average attendance at Town Meeting by precinct and by year.

Precinct	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994*	1995	1996	Average
1	66%	66%	71%	76%	67%	59%	64%	67%
2	70%	74%	82%	81%	86%	78%	76%	78%
3	75%	76%	71%	68%	80%	78%	78%	75%
4	61%	60%	38%	48%	68%	58%	58%	56%
5	54%	64%	55%	61%	76%	75%	77%	66%
6	74%	86%	88%	83%	86%	76%	72%	81%
7	61%	60%	63%	69%	74%	74%	65%	67%
8	78%	89%	89%	83%	89%	82%	71%	82%
9	74%	80%	73%	71%	81%	81%	81%	77%
10	55%	72%	63%	64%	68%	65%	66%	65%
Average	67%	72%	69%	70%	77%	72%	71%	71%

*Precinct lines were re-drawn and everyone was on the ballot.



The Building Committee recommends . .

Appendix B

Survey of individuals elected to Town Meeting in 1994 who are no longer members

November 1996

Rate the following factors for the extent to which they contributed to your decision not to continue as a Town Meeting member:

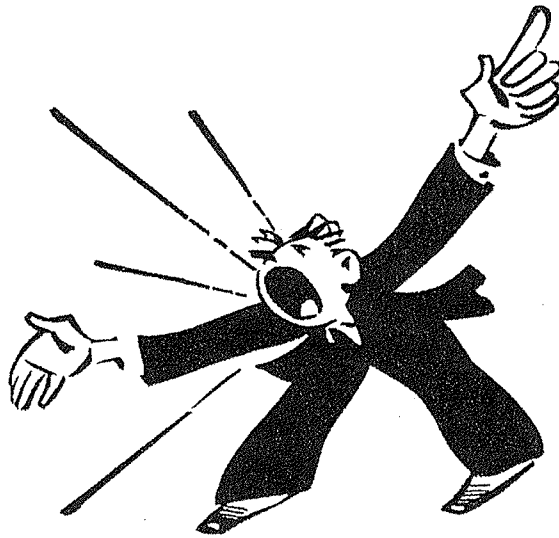
	Number of Responses				
	9	1	7	3	18
1. Personal reasons	not at all				important
2. Too few hours in the day	13	5	6	4	6
	not at all				important
3. Lost interest	16	6	6	3	3
	not at all				important
4. Too often in the minority	17	4	1	0	10
	not at all				important
5. Meetings take too much time	3	2	8	5	15
	not at all				important
6. Some members talk too much	6	2	6	6	15
	not at all				important
7. Presentations by Town boards take too long	13	7	7	2	4
	not at all				important
8. Too much time spent debating minor issues	6	2	7	6	13
	not at all				important
9. Meetings are too contentious for me	17	7	6	1	5
	not at all				important
10. Insufficient information given to vote intelligently	12	7	7	3	4
	not at all				important
11. Meetings run too late	9	3	8	5	10
	not at all				important
12. Unable to accomplish enough	8	5	8	4	10
	not at all				important

Discussion:

- Number receiving the questionnaire: 68
- Number of responses: 38
- Personal reasons were the dominant factor for not continuing.
- Problem areas include Town Meeting taking too much time, some members talking too much, and too much time spent debating minor issues.
- Non-problems include the time spent in presentations, contentious meetings, lack of information, late meetings, and lack of accomplishment.

Demographic Information

Years in Amherst		Years in Town Meeting	
0 or 5	1	1 to 5	23
6 to 10	4	6 to 10	10
10 to 20	7	11 to 20	6
21 to 35	14	21 or more	2
20 to 24	18		



Mr. Moderator! There is a quorum!

Appendix C

Survey of Active Town Meeting Members

January 1997

The column labeled "Average" provides the average response on a scale where disagree is 1 and agree is 5. Numbers below 2.5 show moderate to strong disagreement with the proposition, while numbers above 3.5 indicate moderate to strong agreement.

	Average	Number of Responses				
1. Town Meeting is too large	2.3	76	17	17	10	26
		disagree				agree
2. The election process is too cumbersome	1.8	90	23	19	6	8
		disagree				agree
3. Town Meeting is a forum for special interest groups	2.3	68	15	32	17	14
		disagree				agree
4. Town employees should not vote on budgets	2.4	68	18	23	9	28
		disagree				agree
5. Members should communicate more with constituents	3.6	11	8	47	36	44
		disagree				agree
6. Members are not sufficiently prepared	3.0	23	32	40	24	27
		disagree				agree
7. Insufficient information provided to vote intelligently	2.1	54	42	33	11	6
		disagree				agree
8. More votes by members should be recorded	3.1	34	17	32	23	40
		disagree				agree
9. Too much time is spent on municipal budget	1.9	70	42	22	6	6
		disagree				agree
10. Too little time is spent on school budgets	2.9	42	24	23	25	32
		disagree				agree
11. Format school and municipal budgets the same way	3.4	24	9	46	18	49
		disagree				agree
12. Zoning articles need more background information	3.1	33	19	25	37	34
		disagree				agree
13. Advisory articles should be discouraged	2.8	53	14	21	25	33
		disagree				agree
14. Some members talk too often	3.9	16	16	12	27	75
		disagree				agree
15. Presentations by Town boards take too long	2.4	56	30	21	17	22
		disagree				agree
16. Time limits for speakers should be strictly enforced	4.1	13	5	21	29	78
		disagree				agree
17. Too much time is spent debating minor issues	3.5	19	20	33	26	49
		disagree				agree
18. Meetings run too late	2.8	38	30	30	14	34
		disagree				agree
19. The pace of Town Meeting is too slow	3.0	36	26	27	22	34

20. Town Meeting should start at an earlier hour	2.5	disagree 63	14	24	14	agree 30
21. Ex-officio members should not vote	2.8	disagree 53	10	38	7	agree 37
22. Town Meeting does not represent the public	2.1	disagree 82	20	14	12	agree 17

Discussion:

Number receiving the questionnaire: 236

Number of responses: 146

Town Meeting members agreed with the statements:

- 16. Time limits for speakers should be strictly enforced
- 14. Some members talk too often
- 5. Members should communicate more with constituents
- 17. Too much time is spent debating minor issues

Town Meeting members disagreed with the statements:

- 2. The election process is too cumbersome
- 9. Too much time is spent on municipal budget
- 7. Insufficient information provided to vote intelligently
- 22. Town Meeting does not represent the public
- 1. Town Meeting is too large
- 3. Town Meeting is a forum for special interest groups
- 4. Town employees should not vote on budgets
- 15. Presentations by Town boards take too long

Almost 100 respondents provided written comments on a variety of issues. With few exceptions the members felt that Town Meeting is a democratic institution worthy of preserving. Twenty-three of the forms contained suggestions for encouraging more people to participate in Town Meeting and called for a more diverse membership.

Demographic Information

Reasons for being a Town Meeting member: general interest (93), schools (19), diversity (3), planning (2), conservation (3), finances (3), roads (2), human services (2), library (1), zoning (2), rent (1), playgrounds (1)

Occupations: retired (37), teachers (15), homemakers (7), professors (8), writers (6), lawyers (3), administrators (9), business (5), town employee (4), library (2), self-employed (5), miscellaneous (10)

Years in Amherst		Years in Town Meeting	
0 to 4	6	0 to 4	60
5 to 9	20	5 to 9	33
10 to 14	13	10 to 14	14
15 to 19	19	15 to 19	9
20 to 24	18	20 to 24	16
25 or more	65	25 or more	9

Appendix D

Miscellaneous Information

Length of Town Meeting Debate (Spring 1996):

Average length of a Town Meeting speech: 1:32

Number of times the five-minute limit was exceeded: 23

Number of individuals who spoke more than ten times: 12

Number of regular* Town Meeting members who spoke more than ten times: 3

Total number of individuals who spoke: 108

Number of regular* Town Meeting members who spoke: 67

*Not ex-officio

Frequency of counted votes (standing and tally):

Year	Session	
1990		
	Annual Spring Meeting	11
	Special Town Meetings	3
	Fall Town Meeting	6
1991		
	Annual Spring Meeting	9
	Special Town Meeting	2
	Fall Town Meeting	8
1992		
	Annual Spring Meeting	10
	Special Town Meeting	2
	Fall Town Meeting	5

1993	Annual Spring Meeting	7
	Special Town Meeting	1
	Fall Town Meeting	4
1994	Annual Spring Meeting	7
	Special Town Meeting	0
	Fall Town Meeting	5
1995	Annual Spring Meeting	9
	Special Town Meeting	0
	Fall Town Meeting	2
1996	Annual Spring Meeting	9
	Special Town Meeting	
	Fall Town Meeting	

Occupations of 1996 Town Meeting members:

Retired	44	Teacher	31	Professional	24
Home	18	Professor	16	Student	15
Business	9	Manager	7	Writers	6
Self Employed	6	Lawyer	6	Consultant	5
Social Worker	4	UMass	4	Education	4
Library	4	Town	4	Administrator	3
Secretary	3	Unemployed	2	Miscellaneous	14

Source: 1996 Street List

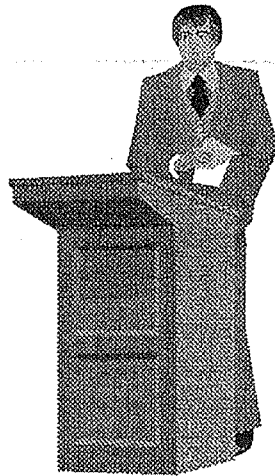
Appendix E

Time spent on various types of Town Meeting articles*

Topic	11/93 ²	3/94 ³	4/94 ¹	6/94 ³	9/94 ³	11/94 ²	1/95 ³	4/95 ¹	6/95 ¹	10/95 ²
Reports	12	6	50			3		44		44
Housekeeping	17		5			50		5	14	1
Municipal Budget	3		175	50				97	18	
Library Budget			20	10				30	20	
School Budget			60	27				51	25	
Debt			35					12		
Enterprise Funds			60			11		45		
Capital Equipment	5	60	136	53	23	73		89	22	205
Land Acquisition	15		70					100	6	72
Roads			16					13		
Other Financial Issues			125	19				98	5	15
Zoning	150		29		20	104		102		12
Other Government	91	46	91	9	20	71		83		7
Non-Government Policy	5		170				88	19		

*Time is given in minutes

1. Annual Town Meeting
2. Fall Town Meeting
3. Special Town Meeting



My time is up already?